

# **How to Succeed With Volunteers-In-Parks**

60-Minute Module Series

## **INTERVIEWING** **Training Guide**

**National Park Service  
Volunteers-In-Parks Program**



# **How To SUCCEED With VOLUNTEERS-IN-PARKS**

## **60-Minute Module Series**

Introduction  
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Needs Assessment  
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# INTRODUCTION

Interviewing candidates for a volunteer position is imperative to ensure that the organization is selecting the most qualified person. A key outcome of conducting an interview is the mutual acquaintance of the volunteer applicant and the prospective volunteer supervisor. Thus, if a prospective volunteer first receives a screening interview from the Park Volunteer Program Manager, it should be followed by an interview with the person who will eventually serve as the volunteer's supervisor.

The interviewer guides a discussion to determine if there is a good match between the interests and needs of the park and the volunteer. This often involves some mutual negotiations so that both parties are winners. Without this significant screening step, many misplaced or inappropriate volunteers begin to work for parks, and both the volunteer and the park staff become dissatisfied. When the wrong person is in the volunteer job, the efforts of volunteer supervision are often distracted to the inevitable problems of poor performance, volunteer dissatisfaction, staff complaints, etc.

Because the National Park Service needs to be concerned about risk management related to volunteers, effective interviewing and screening are key to a well run volunteer program. When asking staff and volunteers to interview other prospective volunteers, however, we must provide training in effective interviewing. This module provides introductory training in this significant skill.

# PURPOSE AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The **Purposes** of this module are to examine the need for interviewing volunteers and to share the basic processes and skills necessary to do it effectively.

## Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this module, participants will be able to:

1. Discuss the importance and purposes of having interviews with prospective volunteers.
2. Identify the four key steps in the interview process.
3. Design relevant interview questions and understand the essential role of listening during the process.

# GENERAL NOTES TO TRAINER

1. This workshop is in a suggested format. Feel free, however, to personalize it with your own stories. Also, phrase questions and activities in a manner most attuned to your participants.
2. Although the focus of this module is interviewing volunteers, the skill is a generic one which may have broader applicability to the participants.
3. Most people have had many experiences where they have been poorly interviewed. Having participants recall personal experiences of being interviewed effectively will immediately begin to reinforce the art and skills involved.
4. It is important to reiterate that this is a cursory overview of the skill of interviewing. Practice will be necessary to develop the skill. We especially recommend role playing as part of the training for interviewing.
5. Because there are three concepts to cover, presentations and facilitation must be crisp and timed. If participants want more information, use this as an opportunity to ask for future additional training time on the topic.

# WORKSHOP OUTLINE

**Transparency Handout      Section      Method of Presentation      Time**

<b>T-1 H-1</b> <b>T-2</b> <b>T-3</b>	<b>Introduction</b> Introductory Activity and Comments Learning Objectives Key Concepts	Activity/Presentation Lecture	10 minutes
<b>T-3 H-1</b> <b>T-4 H-2</b>	<b>Concept 1</b> Interviewing is an opportunity	Presentation/Discussion	5 minutes
<b>T-3 H-1</b> <b>T-5 H-3</b> <b>T-6</b> <b>T-7</b> <b>T-8</b>	<b>Concept 2</b> Stages in interviewing	Presentation Facilitated Discussion	20 minutes
<b>T-3 H-1</b> <b>T-9 H-4</b> <b>T-10 H-5</b> <b>H-6</b>	<b>Concept 3</b> Skills in interviewing	Presentation Activity	20 minutes
<b>T-3 H-1</b>	<b>Summary/Wrap-Up/ Evaluation</b>	Summary Remarks	5 minutes

**TOTAL TIME: 60 minutes**

# TRAINER'S NOTES

## INTRODUCTION

**Time: 10 minutes**

### T-1: Interviewing Activity

#### Opening Exercise

To get the participants thinking about good interviewing skills, start with a light-hearted role play to demonstrate how **not** to conduct an interview.

#### Some ideas;

Interviewer can be very nice and friendly, but at the same time forgets about appointment, doesn't remember person's name, hasn't reviewed application beforehand, doesn't apologize, hasn't set aside time or place, asks closed questions, fails to gather useful information relating to applicant's skills, interests, time availability, doesn't listen, etc. End interview after 5 minutes with a general statement like "I'm sure you'll be fine." Ask interviewee to start next week and refer to him/her to someone else to contact when they arrive.

#### Ask participants to share:

What were the good/bad skills and qualities of this interviewer? You may wish to record responses or have a recorder write them on a flip chart.

**Remember**, an interview is a conversation with a purpose. We will be talking about purpose and about how to get the most out of that conversation.

### T-2: Learning Objectives

### T-3: Key Concepts

### H-1: Key Concepts

#### Share learning objectives of workshop

This training is built on **three Key Concepts**.

(Show transparency with all concepts on it. Indicate that during the workshop each concept will be examined together with relevant material.)



## CONCEPT 1

**Time: 5 minutes**

**Interviewing is an opportunity to determine if the volunteer is appropriate for an identified volunteer position in the park, as well as a chance to screen for evidence of risk.**

### **T-3: Key Concepts**

### **H-1: Key Concepts**

### **H-2: Interviewing**

### **T-4: Importance of Screening**

#### **Presentation:**

1. Paraphrase: It is important to understand that during an interview, there is **mutual screening** (i.e., the agency is discovering if they have the right person and the volunteer is evaluating whether his/her desires, needs and skills can be met in this volunteer opportunity). No longer can we as agency people say, "Here are our needs — can you fill them???" The process, if done well, is one of negotiation so that both are winners.

2. Ask participants to mention (or you may present) other reasons that screening through interviewing is important to the organization.

Touch on screening for potential risk factors relating to:

- Paid staff and volunteer morale
- Park visitors
- Park resources
- Agency reputation

## CONCEPT 2

**Time: 20 minutes**

**The key steps in the interview process are preparation, opening, body and closing.**

### **T-3: Key Concepts**

### **H-1: Key Concepts**

### **T-5: Preparation**

### **H-3: Stages in the Interview Process**

### **T-6: Opening**

### **T-7: Body of Interview**

#### **1. Preparation**

Ask participants what they do to prepare for an interview.

Add the following information if not mentioned and if pertinent to your situation:

- Review all information about the applicant.
- Review pertinent information on the job(s).
- Formulate or use prepared questions to bring out desired information to screen for suitability for the job(s).
- Schedule adequate time and arrange for a private, comfortable place to do the interview.
- Cast aside all distractions!

#### **2. Opening**

Ask participants to suggest essential elements of the opening.

Add the following if not mentioned:

- Welcome applicant, introduce self.
- Put applicant at ease, establish rapport.
- Clarify purpose of interview (“to determine if we have a match”).
- Establish appropriate time frame for interview.

#### **3. Body of Interview**

Share three basic sections of an interview:

(1) Interviewer provides general information on program, agency, group, etc., if the volunteer is unfamiliar with it.

## **T-8: Closing**

(2) Applicant shares information about himself/herself in response to thoughtful questioning. Explore such things as may be appropriate:

- skills
- interests
- experience
- time availability
- work or leadership style
- motivation for wanting this job

(3) Interviewer shares information on appropriate volunteer jobs.

### **4. Closing**

Share key elements of the close of an interview:

(1) Review and summarize interview

(2) Discuss next steps:

- If mutual acceptance - discuss how volunteer can become active.
- If no match - encourage honest sharing / refer person to other agencies utilizing volunteers.

(3) Express appreciation for his/her time

### **Exercise:**

Have participants pair off and exchange the volunteer applications they each filled out previously. Assign one person to conduct the interview, using the application filled out by the other person. Use the volunteer job description developed in a previous exercise as an example of one job that is currently available. Spend no more than 10 minutes conducting the interview, being sure to work through all four of the key interview steps. Ask someone with little prior interviewing experience to describe what went wrong/right with their interview.

## CONCEPT 3

**Time: 20 minutes**

**Two essential skills in interviewing are asking good questions and using reflective listening.**

### **T-3: Key Concepts**

### **H-1: Key Concepts**

### **T-9: Questioning Skills**

### **H-4: Critical Skills in Interviewing**

### **H-5: Common Interviewing Mistakes**

### **H-6: What Can We Ask?**

### **T-10: Listening Skills**

Discuss and lead activities regarding the **two key skills**:

#### **1. Asking questions**

- The most important skill is learning to word questions in a way that will elicit the information you need to make decisions as to the suitability of a prospective volunteer.
- It is best to use open-ended questions (those not answered by one or two words) to get expanded information.

#### **Activity/Example to support learning:**

Ask participants, "If you want to ascertain whether the person you are interviewing can work in a busy, noisy office, how would you phrase the question?" (Give participants a minute to suggest a question and have a few share their suggestions.)

Possible participant response: "Describe an ideal work setting which best suits your working style." If the prospective volunteer answers, "Alone in a quiet room," you know you don't have a match!

#### **Designing interview questions**

Ask participants to suggest several key questions to elicit information needed to determine a candidate's suitability for a specific job. **Discuss their suggestions.**

#### **2. Listening**

Review basic principles of good listening. You may wish to start the discussion by asking participants why it is so difficult to listen. (Answers: you are preparing to respond, distracted, evaluating them or their opinions, not listening for understanding, etc.)

**Exercise:**

Now have the other person conduct a 10-minute interview, using the application filled out by his/her partner. Also use the volunteer job description previously developed as an example of a job currently available. Conduct the interview, taking care to follow the four basic steps as well as to practice the skills of asking good questions and listening.

## **SUMMARY/WRAP-UP/EVALUATION**

**Time: 2 minutes**

**T-3: Key Concepts**

**H-1: Key Concepts**

### **Paraphrase:**

Nothing you do will impact the volunteer program more positively than effective interviewing and screening. When the right people are in the right jobs, the role of volunteer supervisor is a pleasure!

**END 60-MINUTE TRAINING**

## SUGGESTIONS FOR EXPANDED ACTIVITIES

1. Deal with the policies and practices of turning down volunteer applicants and further discuss techniques for saying “No” to a volunteer applicant you are interviewing.
2. Spend more time on designing questions for specific jobs .
3. Allow more time to discuss problem situations that are common in interview situations with your volunteer applicants.
4. End the session with opportunities for people to role play the interview of a volunteer. If the group is very inexperienced, you might wish to demonstrate a brief interview with one of your workshop participants.
5. Allow more time to discuss qualities of good interviewers. There is a great deal of learning potential in this activity.
6. Do a reflective listening activity whereby you get participants into pairs and have one person talk on a designated topic (e.g., how we can improve our visitor services, my opinion on NPS budget priorities) and the other person listens for understanding. The listeners reflect back to the speakers what they understood the speakers to be saying. The speakers give feedback to the listeners as to the accuracy of their summaries. Reverse roles. After the exercise, allow several participants to share what they learned in the experience.

# RESOURCES

1. Graff, Linda L. *Beyond Police Checks: The Definitive Volunteer & Employee Guidebook*, Graff and Associates, 1999.
2. MacDuff, Nancy. *Volunteer Recruiting and Retention: A Marketing Approach*, Points of Light Institute.
3. MacDuff, Nancy. *Volunteer Screening: An Audio Workbook*, Points of Light Institute.
4. Maddux, Robert. *Quality Interviewing*. Crisp Publications, Inc., 95 First Street, Los Altos, Ca. 94022.
5. McCurley, Steve and Rick Lynch. *Volunteer Management: Mobilizing All the Resources in the Community*, Heritage Arts Publishing, 1996.
6. McCurley, Steve and Sue Vineyard. *101 Ideas for Volunteer Programs*, Heritage Arts Publishing, 1986.
7. Stallings, Betty. *Resource Kit for Managers of Volunteers*. Order from: Building Better Skills, 1717 Courtney Avenue, Pleasanton, California 94588.
8. Wilson, Marlene. *The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs*, Chapter VII - Interviewing and Placing Volunteers. Order by calling 1-800-944-1470.
9. National Collaboration for Youth. *Screening Volunteers to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse: A Community Guide for Youth Organizations*, 1997.